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Teaching ESL Versus EFL
Principles and Practices

As a teacher of English, I have had the opportunity to teach in both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. I have found that they are quite distinct, requiring the teacher to approach classes differently. The need for different approaches stems from the fact that in an ESL setting the class is usually multilingual and living in the culture of the target language, whereas in the EFL setting the class is usually monolingual and living in their own country. Brown (2001, 116) says that "it is useful to consider the pedagogical implications for a continuum of contexts ranging from high visibility, ready access to the target language outside the language classroom to no access beyond the classroom door." In each case, different resources can be exploited to meet the students' needs. This article examines how the use of these resources affects four areas of teaching: the motivation level of the students, activity selection, the use of the students' native language (L1)

in the classroom, and ways to approach L1 and target language (L2) culture. I examine these particular aspects of teaching because of their practical significance; each addresses issues that will assist the teacher in creating the optimal space for learning in a variety of contexts. In looking at these issues, I reference my teaching experiences as I transitioned from a multilingual class in San Francisco, California, to a monolingual class in Japan.

Student motivation

A framework

Student motivation has been analyzed and categorized in a variety of ways, yet the effect that it has on teaching and learning remains elusive because motivation is quite challenging to measure and harness. One useful framework for talking about motivation posits that there are two main kinds: *extrinsic motivation,* which stems from a desire for an external reward, and *intrinsic motivation,* which consists of learning for personal reasons as an end in itself (Harmer 1991). But the dichotomy between the two types of motivation is not simple. According to Brown (2001, 75), "intrinsic/extrinsic motivation designates a continuum of possibilities of intensity of feeling or drive, ranging from deeply internal, self generated rewards to strong, externally administered rewards from beyond oneself." Research has shown that students in ESL versus EFL classrooms can be characterized as having different levels of motivation, which could in turn affect how a teacher approaches these contexts.

ESL versus EFL student motivation

In an EFL setting, intrinsic motivation can be low, and English may not seem relevant to the students since it is not part of their daily lives. In many cases, they may be required to study English for a test or because it is a compulsory part of the curriculum (Brown 2001). Also, EFL settings often involve large classes and limited contact hours, which makes learning English an apparently insurmountable challenge (Rose 1999). What options does a teacher have when his or her high school or university class consists of 30 to 50 students and meets once a week for 90 minutes? Such a course, common in compulsory English study, simply does not offer enough exposure to the language.

In an ESL classroom, students are likely to have a higher intrinsic motivation because English is relevant to their daily lives. By being in the target language community, they have more opportunity to use English and see immediate results from using it. The typical students in my ESL classes wanted to learn English for personal reasons, such as to communicate with a variety of people from other countries, or they wanted to learn the language for professional reasons, perhaps to get a better job. By contrast, many of my EFL students lack the opportunity to experience English in their daily lives, and, although they may want to learn it for the same reasons as those of ESL students, their motivation level can suffer when application in daily life is minimal. In the ESL context, many students had higher *integrative motivation,* which Irie (2003, 88) describes as "a desire to assimilate into the target language community." Whether or not they want to assimilate, many of these students have a need to improve their English in order to function in an English-speaking country. Some of the students I encountered in a language school and at a university in San Francisco were learning English because of their desire to stay in the United States. In addition to integrative motivation, many of these students have what Irie (2003) calls *instrumental motivation,* which—like extrinsic motivation—stems from a desire to gain benefits, such as getting a better job or passing an exam.

Which motivation is most desirable? If students are motivated extrinsically versus intrinsically, do the learning results differ?

Theory into practice

According to Brown (2001, 76), "a convincing stockpile of research on motivation strongly favors intrinsic drives." He cites the research of Piaget, Maslow, and Bruner to support the claim that intrinsic motivation is more powerful. Indeed, all of these researchers make the case that the intrinsic drive stems from a profound human psychological need to grow. If so, teachers need to know how to apply this knowledge. They can begin by taking the students' motivation profile into account when they design a class and can then find ways to boost motivation when they perceive it is lacking. Age is one factor that can inform a motivation profile. With children younger than twelve, for whom language learning may come more easily, intrinsic drive can be harnessed if good strategies are used to

hold their attention. Children can be content to study English for its own sake if learning it is fun and engages them. However, many older students, especially EFL students, may not care if they learn English if they perceive it as having no practical significance in their life. Because such students are statistically less likely to be motivated intrinsically to learn English, teachers need to use intrinsically motivating techniques. These include helping students see the uses for English in their lives, presenting them with reasonable challenges, giving them feedback that requires them to act, playing down the role of tests, and appealing to their genuine interests (Brown 2001). By tuning in to what the students are interested in, the teacher is more likely to stimulate them to respond favorably to activities. Moreover, by giving them choices in how they approach activities, the teacher can help them direct their own learning, pursue their preferred learning style, or simply talk about what they want to talk about. Of course, these tips apply to any teaching scenario, but it is in an EFL context that the teacher may need to make a more conscious effort to stimulate intrinsic motivation.

On the other hand, these same EFL students who lack intrinsic motivation may have high extrinsic and instrumental motivation if their education system emphasizes the extrinsic reward of high test scores. These forms of motivation, while perhaps not as good as intrinsic motivation, can still inspire students to work hard under certain circumstances. For example, in my university classroom in Japan, the students frequently speak Japanese for conversation activities in spite of my efforts to convince them to use English. However, when they know they are being evaluated on their oral speech—the main criterion being that they speak only English—they all do so, demonstrating the power of extrinsic motivation. Yet, when we return to our normal class routine, they frequently resume speaking Japanese. Unless the teacher can inspire it, in the EFL context there tends to be a lower incidence of intrinsic motivation. As Brown (2001) observed, if learners have the opportunity or desire to learn language for its own sake, such as to become competent users of that language, they will have a higher success rate in terms of long-term learning than if they are driven by only external rewards.

Activity selection

In considering what activities are appropriate for ESL classrooms, I will use as a model an Oral Communication/Conversation class informed by communicative language teaching. This class is commonly found in language schools and at the university level, both in the United States and abroad.

Principles for selecting ESL classroom activities

In an ESL classroom, the teacher can use the multilingual nature of the class as a resource in a variety of ways. The fact that the students come from different countries becomes a natural "information gap," which can be filled by a variety of question-and-answer and discussion activities about the students' countries. I have observed students gain a sense of confidence when they talk about something about which they are authorities, such as their own country. They can also do presentations to teach classmates about their culture. Students are often quite eager to participate in such presentations. I once had a student from the Congo who astounded everyone with the cultural features that he presented. The ESL context requires students to use only English when they are speaking to students who do not share their language. In fluency practice activities, the teacher can rest assured that the students will not resort to their native language. Task-based problem-solving activities are especially useful in this case because they engage the learners linguistically and cognitively and require them to negotiate a solution entirely in English. This classroom scenario also gives the teacher an opportunity to sometimes focus more intensively on accuracy in speaking because many of the students have ample opportunities for English fluency practice outside of the class. The teacher can also structure specific tasks that require students to go out and use the resources of a native-speaking environment, such as doing a scavenger hunt or language exchange, or interviewing someone and then reporting back to the class.

Selecting EFL activities

In an EFL scenario, the teacher must deal with the fact that the students are probably not receiving any significant exposure to English outside of the classroom. In a survey of my EFL students, 96 percent claimed they had no

interactive exposure to English other than through movies and music. Although movies and music can generate interest in the language and provide useful input, they do not provide the negotiation that two-way communication entails. Because of this lack of opportunity to speak English, teachers need to maximize fluency practice, getting the students to use the language as much as possible in class and reducing emphasis on accuracy. To this end, teachers need to be judicious in their selection of speaking activities to ensure that students will use English. Activities that lack structure or which fail to generate student interest inevitably lead most students to abandon English. Also, an activity that is interesting but too cognitively challenging to manage in English will cause most students to resort to their native language. I have witnessed this situation when I gave my students the following *prioritization tasks,* which had worked wonderfully in my ESL class.

Survival. Students working in pairs are asked to choose six out of ten people from a list to be the last survivors on earth. They must discuss the qualities of each candidate, compare their importance, give opinions on the candidates, and reach a consensus. When their selection is completed, students compare their choices with those of another pair.

The Dinner Party. Students are asked to make a seating arrangement for a dinner party based on descriptions of the personalities of each of the invitees and relationships they have with the other invitees.

In both cases, I observed that 22 pairs of students used Japanese to complete the task. Many of them engaged quite enthusiastically in finding solutions to the problems and precisely because of the compelling quality of the tasks, they discarded cumbersome English in favor of their mother tongue. (See *Role-play* and *Conversation Line* for tips on how to adapt these activities to make them work in a monolingual classroom.)

Criteria for selecting EFL classroom activities

To best elicit English from students in an EFL monolingual class, an activity ought to:

- have a visible, clear, and compelling objective.
- have English use built into the logic of the activity.
- not be too cognitively demanding to manage in English.
- be interesting to the students.

To meet these criteria, I often use games in which the rules require students to accomplish a task by speaking English only. Games provide an organizational framework that makes the activity more appealing and accessible to students. When the element of competition is introduced, tension is heightened by the urge to win. In a game scenario, students seem willing to play by the stated rules; they are motivated to use English because they are given a compelling reason to do so. To further their desire to use English, I tempt my students with a prize, which can only be won if all of the rules are followed—the most significant being speaking English for the duration of the game. More than 50 percent of my students responding to a questionnaire administered to determine their learning interests and preferences indicated that they want to play English games. I have heard teachers say of this preference for games that students just want to have fun and don't really want to work. But I believe it is possible for teachers to integrate fun and work by carefully engineering activities to achieve both. So I try to build a game structure into activities whenever possible. This entails setting a time limit, clarifying the rules, sometimes giving prizes, and generating enthusiasm to play. The next section describes some useful games and why they work.

Sample activities

Guess the Word. In this game, each student is given five to ten cards, each of which has a word with several words beneath it. For example, *umbrella—wet, rain, dry.* The object is to get students to guess the word *umbrella* without using any of the words on the card, gestures, or deictic clues. This game is good for vocabulary review and fluency practice—activating the English they already know.

Information Gap Crossword Puzzles. Students working in pairs each get a copy of a crossword puzzle. One student gets a copy with all of the *across* answers written in and the other student gets a copy with the *down* answers. This activity is a variation on word guessing, in which one student helps another figure out what the missing word is. The first pair to finish the crossword puzzle wins.

These examples meet the above criteria: the objectives are clear and easy to see, and the tension makes it compelling. Since the object of the game is to complete the tasks in English, using the L1 becomes cheating. These activities do not require analysis, which would encourage the students to fall back on their L1. Lastly, the activities are interesting for the students because they are fun, and they give students a chance to use the English they know to fulfill the objective. Three other types of activities I recommend are described below.

Role-play. If well-designed, role-play gives students a compelling reason to stick with English: they get involved in their role. Role-play encourages students to use their imagination, which for some can be quite liberating from the rigor of many "analytic left brain" classroom activities. Role-play can be used to improve *Survival* and *The Dinner Party,* the two activities discussed earlier. In *Survival* characters can represent themselves, explaining why the character should be chosen. In *The Dinner Party,* students acting as the characters can make their own seating arrangements rather than do the more challenging task of talking hypothetically *about* the characters. This reduces the linguistic strain, and by having the students assume the role of English-speaking characters, builds English into the logic of the activity. Another way to ensure that students do not lapse into their L1 is to put them into triads. While two students participate in the role-play, the third one has the task of monitoring English usage and keeping track of any L1 usage. The presence of an observer/enforcer can serve to remind students to proceed only in English. Another possibility is to give students a grade for their participation in the role-play.

Conversation Line. Students face each other in two parallel lines. They are given a conversation task, such as a greeting followed by questions about the weekend (or anything relevant to that moment), which requires them to talk for about two minutes. Using a stopwatch, the teacher instructs them to switch every one to two minutes, at which point each student rotates one space clockwise. This goes on for about 20 to 25 minutes, during which each student talks to 10 to 15 students. What is noticeable is that some students begin to depart from the conversation model and talk to each other spontaneously in English, often laughing and having a good time. Because they are constantly given a new partner, they are able to maintain English for the short duration of each conversation and don't run out of things to say. If the class has an odd number of students, it provides an opportunity for the teacher to join the line and talk one-on-one with many students. This activity is great for injecting energy into the classroom. A conversation line can also be applied to activities like *Survival* or *The Dinner Party.* Rather than doing the entire activity in fixed pairs, each student could do one part of the activity with one partner for a few minutes and then go on to the next partner to discuss the next item. (At the end, they can compare their final list in small groups.) Because students have a greater likelihood of sticking with English when the exchange is brief, they tend to speak more English.

Using Dice. Dice can be creatively applied in a variety of ways, and students love using them. Sometimes, rather than giving students a list of questions to discuss, the teacher can put each question in a box on a board game template (A free download can be found at: http://esl-lounge.com/board_games.html). Somehow, the act of rolling the dice and the resulting randomness of the questions make it more fun for students.

Using the students' L1

L1 in an ESL context

In the multilingual ESL context, there are several issues of concern. One is the teacher's use of the L1 spoken by only some of the students in the class. It is unlikely that the teacher could speak all of the languages spoken by the students (I have had classes with as many as twelve L1s). But even if the teacher could, it would be burdensome to conduct the class using more than two languages, and using the L1 would detract from the English atmosphere of the classroom. Since the teacher is supposed to be the model for English speaking, interacting with some students using their L1 can cause all students in the class to feel that speaking English is not a high priority. I myself have been guilty of this and I found that it can alienate students who do not speak that L1. The point is, the teacher's job is to serve as a model of fairness and neutrality, and using only English is the surest way to achieve this in a multilingual classroom.

Regarding students' use of their L1 in an ESL context, the teacher needs to establish rules at the beginning. In my class in San Francisco, students often chose to sit next to their compatriots, and, naturally, they began speaking their L1. In response to this, I always requested that students pair with someone who spoke a language they do not speak. The rationale I offered was, "Not only is this good for English; it also gives you a chance to learn about another culture." This has always worked quite well in my experience. Of course there were times when I felt that students *were* using their L1 in an appropriate way—usually when they were helping another student with a difficult task requiring an explanation in the L1 or when they were telling another student the equivalent word in the L1.

L1 in an EFL context

The EFL context involves quite different issues regarding the use of the students' L1. In my training, I was always told that all classes should be "English-only." For an ESL teacher, this surely made sense. However, when I began teaching EFL, I started to use a little Japanese in class, though with some trepidation. Perhaps in recognition of this anxiety among EFL teachers who occasionally use the students' L1 in class, Auerbach (1993, 13) observed that "the English-only axiom is so strong that…teachers assigned a negative value to 'lapses' into the L1, seeing them as failures or aberrations, a cause for guilt." I have since come to realize that the reasons for a strict English-only classroom apply mostly to the ESL context. However, this imperative is still frequently enforced because of a solid seeming rationale. As summarized by Auerbach (1993, 14–15), that rationale is that "the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn; as they hear and use English, they will internalize it to begin to think in English; the only way they will learn it is if they are forced to use it." But several recent studies have shed new light on this issue. Schweers (1999) offers a compelling argument for the validity of incorporating the L1 into an EFL classroom. He surveyed students and teachers at his Puerto Rican university and found that 88.7 percent of the students and 100 percent of the teachers felt that Spanish should be used in their English classes. Eighty-six percent of the students felt that their L1 should be used to explain difficult concepts and 67 percent said that their L1 helps them to feel "less lost" (Schweers 1999). My experience in Japan has borne this out; my students respond well when I use Japanese for clarification and to help "lost" students feel included.

In the survey, Schweers asked teachers why they thought that L1 might be more effective than using English exclusively. Some of their responses were that L1 serves as "additional input," is good for establishing rapport with students, and can be used to diminish the affront of a language being imposed upon them (Schweers 1999). He noted that one teacher occasionally used a sentence or phrase in Spanish "to keep the students who do not understand her every word on track as to what is happening in the lesson" (Schweers 1999, 9). From all of this, Schweers concluded that "the pedagogical and affective benefits of L1 use justify its limited and judicious use (Schweers 1999, 7). He went on to say that "recognizing and welcoming their own language into the classroom as an expression of their own culture could be one way of dispelling negative attitudes toward English and increasing receptivity to learning the language" (Schweers 1999, 8).

Some of my students have written that they feel that English has been imposed upon them in an almost imperialistic way. By speaking their language, I validate it and show that English is not intrinsically better or superior in any way, just necessary.

Tang (2002) conducted a similar study in China with Chinese speakers. In comparing the results of her study to those of Schweers, she said, "Both studies indicate that the mother tongue was used by the majority of teachers investigated, and both students and teachers responded positively toward its use" (Tang 2002, 41). "The research seems to show that limited and judicious use of the mother tongue in the English classroom does not reduce students' exposure to English," she said, "but rather can assist in the teaching and learning process" (Tang 2002, 41). These two studies convincingly show that it is a useful principle to work with the linguistic resources that are available, the L1 being the most significant one. Other researchers concur. Nunan and Lamb (1996, as cited in Tang 2002) point out that, as a practical matter, EFL teachers in monolingual classrooms find it impossible to prohibit the use of L1. Rose (1999, 169) sug-

gests that the L1 and L2 be used side by side: "In an EFL setting there is the possibility of an in-depth comparison between learners' L1 and English, which can be helpful in clarifying difficult points" such as grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics, and cultural subtleties. Students have told me that they appreciate my using their language because it makes comprehension easier for them. In an EFL class the teacher can exploit the linguistic homogeneity of the students as a valuable resource.

My personal experience has confirmed that students will use their L1 whether teachers permit it or not. The goal of the teacher is to organize and structure L1 usage so that it can be used only in pedagogically beneficial ways. It is the teacher's job to try to preempt L1 usage that does not serve some purpose by making absolutely clear what constitutes acceptable L1 usage and what does not.

Culture in the classroom

In recent years, culture has become a much-discussed topic in English language teaching discourse. Questions such as how to teach culture, whose culture to teach, the relationship between language and culture, and what constitutes culture have fueled considerable research. Surely, the way culture is approached in ESL classes differs considerably from the way it is approached in EFL classes.

Culture in the ESL context

In the ESL context, the target language culture is significant for students because of its presence in their daily lives. With an increased awareness of the target language culture, students are better prepared to manage their engagement with native speakers. Content classes that teach students about the culture in which they are living serve students well and are generally advocated by ESL teachers. Assuming that the majority of ESL students have a high integrative motivation, teaching them about the target language culture would meet their needs. For example, pragmatic competence in this scenario is significant because the students will most likely need to interact with native speakers. Judd, in a discussion of how necessary native-speaker pragmatic knowledge is, says that some students "may need and want to adapt to native-speaker norms. Thus, it is incumbent on those of us teaching ESL to present pragmatic information to our students so that they have the tools to use such knowledge, should they desire" (1999, 160). In addition, the ESL scenario provides a great opportunity for students to teach their classmates about their culture as "cultural ambassadors." So the class becomes a world culture learning experience, with an emphasis on comparing cultures. Students are very much interested in such an exchange. It is the teacher's job to organize it. As Matikainen and Duffy point out, "learning about cultural diversity provides students with knowledge and skills for more effective communication in intercultural situations" (2000, 40). Many students are learning English for precisely that reason. Indeed, many of my students have indicated that they want to learn English in order to "communicate with foreigners from all over the world."

Culture in the EFL context

The EFL setting raises questions about what culture to focus on. Clearly, the L1 culture ought to be incorporated into the curriculum because it is useful for students to reflect on their own culture and be able to explain various features of it to others. Straub (1999, 3) recommends that students begin with their own culture to "raise the participants' awareness that they are members of a particular culture. By exploring their own culture, students acquire the vocabulary with which to describe values, expectations, behaviors, traditions, customs, rituals, forms of greeting, cultural signs, and identity symbols familiar to them." When we discuss common cultural reference points, my EFL students are often surprised at the kinds of things that constitute culture because they believe that the features of their culture are not "culture" but rather "just the way things are."

What about the L2 culture? True, the students are learning English, but the question remains, which culture should represent the English-speaking culture? Nowadays, English as a Foreign Language is regarded as English as an International Language (EIL), thereby complicating the question of what constitutes the "target" culture. McKay states that in an EIL scenario, non-native speakers do not need to acquire the culture of native speakers of English because "…they will not be living and interacting in the native-English-speaking context" (2003, 1). According to Smith (1976, 1; as cited in McKay 2003), "there is

no necessity for L2 speakers to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language [because] the purpose of teaching an international language is to facilitate the communication of learners' ideas and culture in an English medium." McKay (2003, 1) argues that if this is so, "then the entire notion that learners of EIL need to learn the culture of native speakers of English…must be challenged." Instead, they need to be sensitized to the practices of a variety of other cultures in order to develop their intercultural communication skills, something the teacher can foster by including activities in the curriculum that get students to reflect on their own culture and consider alternate views from other cultures. Such activities can be found in many communicatively-based textbooks and a new kind of textbook that focuses exclusively on intercultural study.

Culture and learning style

Another aspect of culture to take into account in EFL and ESL settings is the learning style of the students. For example, Japanese learners have been classified as "reflective learners," who are hesitant to speak, whereas Brazilian students, according to this classification system, would be "impulsive learners" (Gas and Selinger 2001, 173). In light of this analysis, it would behoove teachers to consider the learning styles of their students and adjust their teaching practices accordingly, acknowledging the reality of the students' cultural circumstance. As Cortazzi and Lin (1999, 212) explain it, "the *culture of learning* that students and teachers bring to the classroom is a taken-for-granted framework of expectations, attitudes, values, and beliefs about what constitutes good learning." In an ESL context, unlike in EFL, the teacher does not have the luxury of being able to cater to one culture-bound learning style. However, awareness of the variety of learning styles can assist the teacher in relating to the students, adjusting expectations, and managing the class. This can be done, for example, by pairing students together strategically so that the more "reflective" learners may benefit from interaction with those who are more "impulsive."

In EFL , the teacher can apply this knowledge further, making informed choices about how to approach the class. For example, following communicative language teaching, I was taught that it is essential to get students orally producing the language as soon as possible. But I found that some of my low level university students in Japan are not ready for speech production, as evidenced by their refusal to speak. It is impossible to force students to speak when they do not feel ready or able. Ellis (1997, 20) points out that "some L2 learners…undergo a silent period. That is, they make no attempt to say anything to begin with. They may be learning a lot about the language just through listening to or reading it." As a teacher, I need to permit students to have a silent period and acknowledge that they still can be learning English even when they are not orally producing it. McKay (2003, 4) argues that "it is important when selecting a methodology for a particular context for teachers to consider the local needs of the students rather than assume that a method that is effective in one context is effective in all contexts." Ultimately, it is the teacher's job to facilitate learning for a specific group of students, whatever overhaul of methodology that may entail.

Conclusion

Analyzing the pedagogical implications of transitioning from an ESL to an EFL teaching environment sheds light on distinctions between the two and various ways to approach each. The most salient features from my experience—student motivation, activity selection, use of the students' L1, and teaching culture—provide a framework for examining the insights I gained from teaching in San Francisco and Japan. I feel that the classes I taught in these areas provide apt contexts for this kind of analysis because they each represent a microcosm of ESL and EFL classrooms and expose some of the issues that teachers, wherever they are, need to negotiate. Regarding future research, it would be interesting to examine a wider variety of ESL and EFL contexts to see if it is possible to generate teaching principles that would provide a pedagogical basis for the kinds of decisions teachers need to make.

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